

New management training could lead to improved worker health

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In an effort to improve worker health, researchers from Michigan State University and Portland State University have created an innovative training program that calls for supervisors to better support their employees' work and family demands.

The scientific-based program is featured in the upcoming August edition of the *Journal of Management*.

The researchers also have been awarded a \$4.1 million federal grant to refine and expand the program. The grant is part of a \$30 million initiative of the Work, Family and Health Network - jointly funded by the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - examining how company policies affect the health and well-being of employees and their families.

MSU's Ellen Ernst Kossek, who created the training program with Portland State's Leslie Hammer, said the research is timely given the nation's current economic crisis.

"Businesses are searching for new ways to manage in a tough economy," said Kossek, University Distinguished Professor in MSU's School of Labor and Industrial Relations. "Our study shows that just teaching managers to be more supportive can have cost savings for turnover and lower stress, which affects the bottom line."

Most previous research on supervisory support has focused on general

measures of emotional support - as opposed to specific behaviors by the boss. The new training program outlines four detailed measures for supervisors:

- Emotional support, which is focused on perceptions that workers are being cared for and their feelings are being considered. This includes talking to workers and being aware of their family and personal life commitments.
- Role-modeling behaviors, in which supervisors, in a mentoring role, provide examples of strategies and behaviors for employees intended to lead to desirable work-life outcomes.
- Instrumental support, which is reactive and pertains to supervisor support as he or she responds to employees' day-to-day needs such as scheduling requests for flexibility.
- Creative work-family management, which is more proactive and strategic than instrumental support and can involve major changes in the time, place and way that work is done. One example involves dealing with work-family demands in the total work group setting by offering cross-training within and between departments.

Ultimately, the researchers say, today's managers and employers need examples of how they can change supervision and cultures to meet the changing needs and demographics of the work force. The new program helps begin this path by providing specific supervisor behaviors that offer more family supportive interactions with employees.

"Managing in a more supportive way that recognizes how important flexibility is to today's work force is a win-win economic proposition

that benefits employers, workers and families," Kossek said. "Employees no longer leave their family needs at the company doorstep."

Source: Michigan State University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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